Classical and Vignette Television Advertising Dramas: Structural Models, Formal Analysis, and Consumer Effects

BARBARA B. STERN*

This article identifies and analyzes two types of television advertising dramas: classical and vignette. Drama criticism in theater, film, and television is the source used to identify the elements of advertising dramas—narration, plot, story, and character—and to propose models of the two different types. The two models are employed in an empirical analysis of an advertising sample. Consumer effects of classical and vignette dramas are proposed in terms of the attribution theory of persuasion and the elicitation of empathy versus sympathy responses.

> If the television commercial could be shown to be drama, it would be among the most ubiquitous and the most influential of its forms and hence deserve the attention of the serious critics and theoreticians of that art. . . . A comprehensive theory, morphology, and typology of drama is urgently needed. [ESSLIN 1979, p. 96]

The presence of *drama*—one of the three major literary genres used to classify fictional works—has been noted and discussed in a variety of marketing, consumer, and advertising phenomena. Its influence on the academic and practitioner literature is such that models from modern dramaturgy—the theory of dramatic performance—have been adapted as a theoretical basis for studying symbolic meaning in a host of marketing and consumption-related contexts (Levy 1959). Many of these contexts have themselves been labeled "dramas": notably, products (Durgee 1988), price negotiations (Sherry 1990), consumption activities (Leiss, Kline, and Jhally 1986), holiday rituals (Wallendorf and Arnould 1991), consumer experiences (Holbrook 1986; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982), values (Marchand 1985), and service experiences (Grove and Fisk 1989). Drama has been embraced with particular enthusiasm in consumer research, for "the drama of consumer satisfaction" (Leiss et al. 1986, p. 232) has been the focus of considerable interest in the past decade.

*Barbara B. Stern is professor of marketing, Faculty of Management, Newark, at Rutgers—The State University of New Jersey, Ackerson Hall, Newark, New Jersey 07102. She thanks the three reviewers and Kent Monroe for their helpful suggestions. This work was supported in part by the Rutgers University Research Council.

When ads themselves have been examined as dramas (see Boller 1990; Boller and Olson 1991; Boller, Olson, and Babakus 1992; Deighton, Romer, and McQueen 1989; Stern 1990, 1991, 1992), the research has followed Wells's (1989) dichotomy between drama and lecture. Differentiation is based on attributes such as narration, plot, and character, and drama has been associated with consumer effects such as increased empathy (Boller et al. 1992), heightened emotion, diminished counterargument (Deighton et al. 1989), and increased inferencing (Wells 1989). This research has emphasized the importance of form, for, as Deighton et al. (1989, p. 341) say, "An audience's response to a presentation is shaped by its form."

However, despite the emphasis on form, most prior advertising research has posited advertising drama as a monolithic construct opposite to "lecture" (Wells 1989) or "argument" (Deighton et al. 1989). The dichotomy rests on narrative "telling" in lecture versus nonnarrative "showing" in drama (Booth 1983). That is, while lectures use narrators who describe events, dramas allow characters to perform or show the events directly. Thus, drama is construed as the polar opposite of lecture "on a continuous scale constructed with plot, character, and narration as attributes that mark transitions along the scale" (Deighton et al. 1989, p. 335). The distinction has been found germane to advertising's influence on consumer processing of claims, in that dramas persuade in three ways: by drawing audiences into an experiential learning situation (Deighton and Hoch 1993), by engendering empathic emotional responses, and by stimulating inferencing.

While this article accepts the distinction between dramatic showing and lecturelike telling, it identifies a problem in the dichotomous formulation that has here-

tofore gone unnoticed. The problem is that the research tradition has presumed only one type of television drama, which we call "classical," and has overlooked a second type derived not from Greek antecedents but from Elizabethan, which we call "vignette" (see Moriarty 1991). This is a problem because classical and vignette dramas differ from each other as much as they do from lectures. In consequence, a closer look at each type is necessary to formulate a complete definition of what drama ads look like for classification purposes, to determine how different types can be evaluated as to quality, and to propose a difference in consumer assignations of causality and experiences of emotional responses based upon stimulus type.

Such analysis requires a move forward from prior advertising research's reliance upon *literary* criticism—Aristotelian theory that deals with theatrical performance—as the source of formal analysis. To do so, this article turns to overlooked sources of information about advertising dramas: film and television criticism. The rationale for examining the roots of advertising drama in electronic media as well as in "live" theatrical performance is that it explains how what once was a singular construct became bifurcated in the course of time. The bifurcation requires a change in prior research assumptions about the elements of narration, plot, and character as drama's building blocks. The mission of this article is to examine both dramatic types, in order that better knowledge of advertising stimuli may contribute to better assessment of consumer responses. To this end, it addresses three questions: What are the attributes of classical and vignette drama? What structural models describe each type? What is the relationship between each type as an advertising stimulus and consumer responses to it?

The article begins by drawing upon the related research areas of literary criticism, film aesthetics, and television/communication studies to trace the components of classical and vignette drama (Stern 1989). Next, it distinguishes between plot, story, and narrative, and presents models of the two types. It then demonstrates the use of the models in an empirical analysis of an advertising sample previously used in research (Deighton et al. 1989). Last, it discusses the relationship of the drama types to attribution theory (Kelley 1973) and relates the typology to consumer responses of empathy versus sympathy.

ELEMENTS OF ADVERTISING DRAMAS: NARRATION, PLOT, STORY, AND CHARACTER

> To researchers, the distinction between lecture and drama offers an opportunity to explore a whole new territory. We know a lot about lectures, but our understanding of dramas, and of lecture-dramas, is woefully incomplete. [WELLS 1989, p. 20]

FIGURE 1

ADVERTISING DRAMA

THEATER ⟶ CINEMA ⟶ TELEVISION ⟶ ADVERTISEMENT

In order to identify two types of drama in television commercials, it is necessary to begin with the branch of literary criticism known as "genre criticism" (see Fowler 1982). This scholarship is the foundation of formal analysis, for its goal is the identification of criteria for classification purposes. Following Aristotle, all of literature is divided into three large genres or forms: poetry, narratives (novels or short stories), and drama (Abrams 1988). The key elements out of which all genres are composed are narration, plot, and character, and formal distinctions rest on differences in their usage and combination. Analysis of the types from the developmental perspective requires a closer look at advertising dramas in light of their dual theatrical and electronic ancestry (see Chatman 1978; Pfister 1991).

Narration: Stage and Electronic

To begin with the distinction between drama and lecture, we note that the element of narration is not as definitive a discriminator as prior research has assumed. Narration is the factor most often mentioned as the discriminant one differentiating drama (nonnarrated) from lecture (Wells 1989) or argument (Deighton et al. 1989). Lecturelike narration presumes a narrative *character*—a visible or vocal person who stands between events and an audience and interprets them to the audience. In so doing, the narrative character "draws attention to the fact that events have been selected from a larger set of past events and are being reported to the audience for a reason" (Deighton et al. 1989, p. 336). In contrast, drama does away with a narrator-as-character, allowing events to unfold directly to the audience with no mediation. Advertising research has posited narration as a lecturing character's function because its fundamental assumption is that advertising drama is an outgrowth of nonnarrated stage plays.

However, this assumption must be challenged, for all television advertising (see Fig. 1) derives more proximately from electronic than from theatrical drama. As such, the concept of narrativity requires disentanglement from that of the narrative character, for electronic media cannot exist without the ubiquitous nonhuman narrative devices of cameras and recording equipment. In consequence, no television commercial—whether lecture or drama—can be considered nonnarrated because the electronic eye is an omnipresent narrative force shaping the staged events for the audience. Electronic equipment may be less obtrusive than human

narrative characters, but it is, nonetheless, a mediator interposing between the action and the audience's view of it. It is a modern descendant of the ancient Greek chorus, whose classical dramatic function was to provide an intermediary communication system analogous to the authorial narrator of epics. Although the Greek chorus was never widely used in English drama (Abrams 1988), its narrative function was occasionally taken over by choral characters, such as the stage manager in Thornton Wilder's *Our Town.* With the advent of filmed drama, the electronic eye acquired the narrative function of the choral character by becoming the mediating force.

The electronic eye functions by serving as the "point of view" that shapes an audience's perspective by means of selectivity, order, and arrangement of details. Electronic mediation guides the audience's attention to what is important, thus enabling a meaningful interpretation of the dramatic events. Its most important aspect is a more subtle and more elastic manipulation of time and space on screen than is possible on stage. While all filmed commercials reveal electronic narrativity, it is the overtness, placement, nature, and number of explicit narrative devices that distinguish one form of drama from another (as well as from lecture). In our formulation, the explicitness versus the implicitness of narration (Pfister 1991)—a dimension that may be viewed as a continuous rather than a categorical variable—is what differentiates classical from vignette drama.

Once the concept of narration has been disentangled from that of a narrator-as-character, the role of television cameras and sound equipment as the mediating communication system can be specified. They fulfill the narrative functions of controlling the audience's temporal and spatial perspective as well as that of introducing verbal and visual interpolations (music, voice-overs, on-screen logos, and product slogans). Electronic narrativity is especially important in the development of vignette drama advertising (see below), for the electronic eye controls the viewers' perspective by means of equipment with nearly limitless capacity to move around chronologically and geographically. The cameras determine what the audience sees by means of shooting angles, framing, focal length, lighting, editing, and cutting techniques that enable movement closer to or farther from a single temporal action (Heisley and Levy 1991) as well as movement across multiple and varied spatial actions. In this way, video technology manipulates space by means of close-ups, zoom images (Sontag 1977), and montages. It manipulates time by means of flashbacks, flash-forwards, stretch time (slow-down), concentrated time (speedup), and stopped time (freeze-frames). Insofar as a narrative mediation system exists independent of a narrator in all electronic dramas, it is necessary to consider degree of explicitness as a classification factor in drama types.

Plot and Story: Chronology, Causality, and Character Change

Continued discussion of classification factors requires a clear distinction between "plot" and "story." While advertising research has recognized the lack of plot as a feature of lectures, it has not clarified the difference between plot and story as the basis of classical versus vignette dramas. Indeed, the two terms are often used interchangeably, giving rise to such statements as "an argument starts to become a story when plot is introduced" (Deighton et al. 1989, p. 335). We suggest that the reverse is the case, for (see below) an argument starts to become a plot when a story is introduced—story is prefatory to plot. The difference between the two is fundamental, for vignette drama comprises a loosely structured series of stories in an associational relationship, while classical drama comprises a tightly structured single plot with a causal relationship. In other words, far from being synonymous, plot and story are, respectively, the dominant features of different drama types. E. M. Forster's statement of the difference is a succinct summary (1954, p. 86): "Let us define a plot. We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on causality. 'The king died and then the queen died' is a story. 'The king died, and then the queen died of grief' is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it. . . . Consider the death of the queen. If it is in a story we say 'and then?' If it is in a plot we ask 'why?' "

Story refers to the unfolding of events in a chronologically linear time sequence; plot adds causal relationships internal to the sequence (Frye 1973) and emphasizes change in the life of a character as the focal point of the final resolution. Story thus contains a string of chronological events and answers the question, What happened? Plot adds an answer to the question (Holman 1980), Why did it happen? Note the key role of causality in plot, a role that paves the way for application of the attribution theory of persuasion to the drama dichotomy. Causality is crucial to plot unity, the supreme Aristotelian value in classical drama (Fergusson 1961, p. 65, emphasis added): "A whole is that which has a *beginning,* a *middle,* and an *end.* A beginning is that which does not itself follow anything by *causal necessity,* but after which something naturally is or comes to be. An *end,* on the contrary, is that which itself naturally follows some other thing, either by necessity, or as a rule, but has nothing following it. A *middle* is that which follows something as some other thing follows it."

In the classical drama tradition, causality is the major characteristic that sets plot apart from story, for while the latter is a chain of unrelated but associated episodes (one "and then" after another), the former is an integrated entity demonstrating a causal relationship between organically related temporal occurrences. These

TABLE 1

VIGNETTE DRAMAS

Sponsor	No. of characters	Interaction	Nature of characters	Setting	Type, amount, location of narration
Beef Council-A	Many	None	Driver, diners	Roads, truck, cafe	Music, continuous, product lyric; no voice-over
Kraft dressing-A	Many	None	Diners, chefs	Restaurants-Italy	Music, continuous, no lyrics; voice-over, continuous
Lee jeans-A	Many	None	Women putting on jeans	Various rooms, gym	Music, continuous, no lyrics; voice-over, intermittent
Lee jeans-B	6	None	Three twosomes	Lawn, store, kitchen	Music, continuous, product lyric; voice-over, end
Gallo wine	Many	None	Wedding party	Various weddings	Music, continuous, no lyrics; voice-over, end
Paul Masson wine	6+	None	Guests, outsider	Outside house, inside	Music, continuous, no lyrics; voice-over, continuous
Seagram's cooler-A	Many	Gesture	Bar-goers, entertainers	Bars, streets: night	Music, continuous, product lyric; no voice-over
Seagram's cooler-B	Many	None	Horseback riders	Horse show: day	Music, noncontinuous, no lyrics; voice-over, continuous
Perrier	Many	None	French townspeople	Various locales	Music, continuous, no lyrics; voice-over, continuous
Diet Pepsi-B	Many	Gesture	Wedding party	Outdoor wedding	Music, continuous, product lyric; no voice-over
California Raisins	Many	Musical	TV couple, food figures	TV room, table	Music, continuous, product lyric; voice-over, middle, end
7-UP-A	6+	None	People in rain	Urban locales: night	Music, continuous, lyrics; no voice-over
7-UP-B	Many	None	People in rain	Suburban locales: day	Music, continuous, product lyric; no voice-over
Nike Air	Many	None	Sports players	Various sports sites	Music, continuous, lyrics; no voice-over

occurrences add up to a single entity—an artistic unity with a complete and ordered structure in which the component episodes are neither removable nor interchangeable. Aristotle defines this unity as a function of singularity and fixed order (Fergusson 1961, p. 67): "The plot, being an imitation of an action, must imitate one action and that a whole, the structural union of the parts being such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed."

The causality and linear chronology that distinguish plot from story can be used to differentiate the two types of advertising dramas in order to analyze more precisely what each is and does. Plotted dramas—those most usually considered in advertising research—seek to persuade by means of what Deighton and Hoch call the comprehension of a dynamic "chain of action depicted in the discourse" (1993, p. 267). However, we emphasize that these claims are relevant to *plots* only, for they require the audience to comprehend both a chain of events (linearity) and a causal link between product and change (causality). Hence, even though this definition of comprehension may be appropriate for evaluating plotted dramas, it does not suit story dramas in which neither linearity nor causality is present. The problem of mismatched criteria is evident in responses to Deighton and Hoch's test of comprehension of the Diet Pepsi "Wedding" commercial (see Table 1), in which some respondents saw nothing unfold over time and failed to detect a sequence of actions.

Whereas Deighton and Hoch speculate that the commercial was processed like an argument—"a telling (admittedly in pictures) but not a showing" (1993, p. 273)—we propose that a more salient distinction is the influence of story versus plot on the drama's path to persuasion. In this regard, consumer comments on the commercial's lack of linearity and causality suggest that the diagnostic does not elicit meaningful responses because it tries to measure something not present in the stimulus. In lieu of a plot, the commercial exhibits an "and then" series of story incidents—it is a vignette drama using "different scenes and people edited together in rapid succession" (Moriarty 1991, p. 91), for which an outcome other than comprehension may be more appropriate. In light of this, the story/plot distinction provides a theoretical rationale for Deighton and Hoch's (1993) speculation that the wedding commercial takes a path to persuasion more reliant upon holding an audience's attention than upon eliciting comprehension. In Forster's words, a story piques curiosity and keeps audiences "awake by 'and then'—'and then.' " In contrast, "a plot demands intelligence and memory" (1954, p. 86).

To sum up, the distinction in advertising formats that parallels advertising's literary antecedents contributes

FIGURE 2

CLASSICAL AND PANORAMIC DRAMA ATTRIBUTES

CLASSICAL DRAMA	VIGNETTE DRAMA
PLOT	STORY
PATTERN: SINGLE ACTION	*MULTIPLE ACTIONS*
TIME: LINEAR CHRONOLOGY	DISCRETE CHRONOLOGY
PROGRESSION: BEGINNING/MIDDLE/END	REPETITION: NO ORDER
SPACE: UNITY OF SPACE	VARIETY OF SPACE
CAUSATION: CAUSAL RELATION	ASSOCIATIVE RELATION
CHANGE: CHANGE IN END-STATE	REPETITION THROUGHOUT
FEW CHARACTERS	MANY CHARACTERS
INTERACTIVE IN PLOT	NON-INTERACTIVE/STORIES
MAIN CHARACTER(S)	NO MAIN CHARACTER
IMPLICIT NARRATION	EXPLICIT NARRATION
INTERMITTENT	CONTINUOUS
FEWER DEVICES	MORE DEVICES
LESS NARRATION TIME	MORE NARRATION TIME

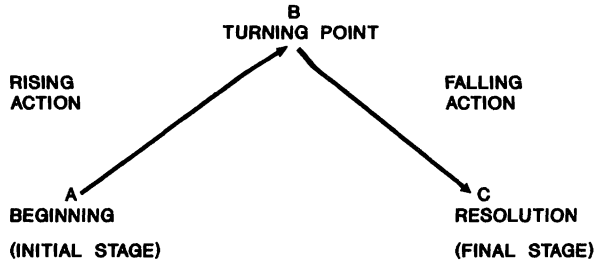
a taxonomic device capable of enriching evaluation of advertising by permitting analysis of communicative outcomes in light of formats used to achieve these outcomes. Whereas the goal of advertising comprehension derives from the Aristotelian perspective of plot as the essence of drama, it relates most aptly to classical dramas. Other goals such as attention seem better suited to the variety and abundance of stories characteristic of vignette dramas. Here it is important to emphasize that the traditionally high valuation of the classical plot constructed in accordance with "rules" about unity is not fixed in stone. Rather, the classical heritage has been routinely ignored by dramatists from the Elizabethan era up to the present, including advertising creatives.

MODELS OF CLASSICAL AND VIGNETTE DRAMAS

Because prior advertising research has assumed that all drama is classical and hence contains plot, it has not considered the vignette type, structured differently as a compilation of stories. The reason for this omission may be that the familiar classical pattern of temporal progression in a fixed order (beginning to end) motivated by causality, moved forward by character interaction, and terminated by a change in the character's situation has long been seen as both normative and rhetorically determined. The rhetorical structure of the classical model emphasizes causal progression, but a different rhetorical structure animates vignette drama. Here, rhetorical emphasis flows from the associative stories, which show the abundance, variety, and flexibility of human life organized in a repetitive pattern as distinct from a linear and causal one (Pfister 1991). The distinction between the types (Fig. 2) calls for more detailed discussion so that it can be operationalized in the analysis of an advertising sample and linked to consumer responses via attribution theory (classical dramas/single observances versus vignette dramas/multiple observances) and the empathy/sympathy distinction.

FIGURE 3

CLASSICAL DRAMA MODEL: THE INVERTED V



Classical Dramas: The Inverted V Plot

Classical and vignette dramas can each be pictured in terms of structural models that depict their workings. The classical model is the one alluded to in prior advertising research (Deighton et al. 1989), in which Bruner's definition of a plot as "a stable state of affairs breached to induce a crisis and finally redressed" (in Deighton et al. 1989, p. 336) is used. It is also the model referred to as a "causal scenario" (Read 1987; Schank and Abelson 1977) in attribution theory (see below). This model was first pictured in literary criticism by Freytag ([1863] 1895), who drew an inverted V to describe a structure adhering to Aristotelian principles of linear chronology, causality, and unity. It portrays the classical plot as a pyramidal single action in which three stages lead to character change (Fig. 3). The action begins at an initial stage, progresses in rising action to peak at a turning point, and ends in falling action, in which the final stage of resolution shows the completed change in the character's situation. The model is goal oriented, finite, and single-minded, aiming at a clear demonstration of one occurrence whose causality and progress are designed to be comprehensible to an audience.

All of the parts are so closely connected that the transposition or withdrawal of any one of them would undermine the whole by reducing comprehension. The model is useful not only to describe the structure of classical ads for purposes of formal analysis (see next section), but also to pinpoint the moment of greatest danger to plot unity in "slice-of-life" executions by showing where it can dwindle into something "contrived or hokey" (Deighton et al. 1989, p. 336). The description and the danger will now be discussed by means of an exemplar—a slice-of-life television spot for Aspirin-Free Excedrin.

The plot beginning (*A*) (Pfister 1991) presents the originating situation that is the current state of affairs in which the characters dwell. In this exemplar, it con-

sists of an opening view of a woman going over financial data at her home computer. She is edgy and restless, rubbing her neck and arching her back to signify that she is physically uncomfortable. The camera pans toward her, focusing in on her visible pain. Note that the camera is the unobtrusive narrator, directing the audience to keep track of plot chronology and causality in electronic time by literally pointing to what is important and to why the characters seek change.

The rising action (*AB*) shows the characters revealing their motivations up to the moment of change that enables the transformation of the initial situation into the final one. The characters interact with each other by means of word (dialogue) and gesture (nonverbal body language)—they speak, make eye contact, and touch. Their interaction in this stage builds suspense. However, suspense in most ads (Esslin 1979) develops not because the audience is uncertain as to *what* will occur, but, rather, because it is uncertain as to *how* it will occur. In the Excedrin commercial, after the opening shot of the woman's pain, her husband walks in and asks whether she needs something for her headache. She asks how he knows that she has a headache, and he says, "Honey, it shows." Her motivation for change is to relieve discomfort, and her husband's motivation is to show caring support.

At this juncture, the turning point (*B*) occurs—an action that alleviates suspense by introducing the causal agent that will determine the outcome. A sudden product introduction forms the turning point, for a bottle of Excedrin appears on screen, with a voice-over saying, "for a headache so bad that it shows." The slogan echoes the husband's remark about his wife's headache, establishing resonance (McQuarrie and Mick 1992) between the product benefit (the context *outside* the ad) and the dramatic dialogue (the text *inside* the ad).

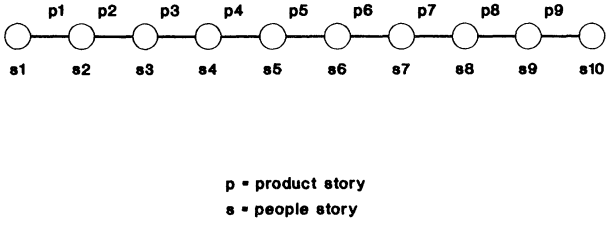
In the falling action (*BC*), the plot moves toward a resolution (*C*), often a change in the character's situation that occurs as a result of recognizing the solution to the problem. The solution involves an interaction between the product, the protagonists, and the situation. This happens in the Excedrin commercial when the wife looks at the bottle her husband has brought to her, repeats the product name, and takes the medication. The resolution depicts her transformed state, now headache free, smiling, and saying, "That's better." The resolution enables the plot to achieve closure by depicting a beneficial change (Abrams 1988).

The model permits analysis of the structure of a slice-of-life ad such that the danger point—point *B*—can be identified. This is the moment when the overt appearance of the product in the middle of the commercial as a quasi-narrative character may act as a negative interrupt (see Bettman 1979), one that awkwardly disrupts drama processing. The intrusion of an interrupt may break the dramatic spell by thrusting an inconsistent element—an overt narrative interpolation or a product demonstration—into a human situation just at the moment when something crucial is going to happen. While such abrupt switches may be disruptive at any stage of the action, they seem most likely to distance the audience (rather than to draw the audience in) at the turning point. Here, interrupts risk violating the organic unity of plot development by interjecting an externally imposed "tell" agent that stops the action in the middle of the show. Like an unwelcome intermission, an overt and awkwardly placed interrupt may disrupt consumers' dramatic experience. Further research on the role of product interrupts is needed, for they are a commonplace of television commercials for supermarket products (Pampers), personal care items (Palmolive Liquid), and laundry and cleaning aids (Tide, Gain). Insofar as the sudden appearance of a product in the midst of a plot may disrupt rather than guide processing, researchers might want to follow Bettman's suggestion to determine "how much of a departure from expectations is needed for an interrupt" to occur (1979, p. 103).

To sum up, the model identifies the turning point as a potential weak spot in a realistic plot if a product is awkwardly introduced as a causal interrupt. It pictures plot unity based upon chronology, causation, and change, highlighting the apex of the inverted V as the place where an awkward break can interrupt the continuity essential to classical drama.

FIGURE 4

VIGNETTE DRAMA MODEL: SERIES OF STORIES



Vignette Drama: The Story Series

Despite the persistence of the classical tradition, it is not the only dramatic antecedent of advertising. Both the structural pattern and the potential weakness of vignette drama differ from those of the classical type. The vignette model (Fig. 4) has been adapted from electronic drama theory (Chatman 1978; Hatlen 1962), whose roots lie more in Elizabethan notions of drama than in classical ones. We term these nonclassical dramas "vignette" (see Moriarty 1991) to signify the presentation of stories spanning a broad spectrum of space, time, characters, and product usage situations. It is important to emphasize that this type of drama—one with many stories but no single plot—is simply a later development

in the history of drama, not a deformation of the classical ideal. Shakespeare and his contemporaries valued exuberance in story episodes and abundance of characters more than singleness of plot, and later dramatists have continued to disregard the classical unities of time, place, and action. Nonetheless, this form is classifiable as a drama (not a lecture), because no matter how many or how varied the stories, they are performed rather than described.

Vignette advertising dramas aim at breadth of focus rather than at depth, for they present a sequence of stories ordinarily organized by principles of alternation and repetition and centered on a product. Alternation governs the overall structure of the commercial, for usually one set of stories relates to people, alternating with another set relating to the product. Within each set, the characteristic organizational device is repetition, for each story replicates the others by providing a specific individual instance of diversity in the "anthropological, social and psychological environment of the dramatic figures" (Pfister 1991, p. 245). These figures are generally shown in separable scenes, for the individual people stories feature a diverse cast of characters who interact within each individual story but not between them. That is, no one story is structurally contingent upon any other—each is a discrete unit associated in contiguous time and space, not in a causal relationship. There is no main character as the focal point of interest, and spatial discontinuity is the norm, for the people stories and the product stories may occur in different temporal and geographical locales.

However, the existence of an alternating set of stories does not automatically condemn every vignette drama to chaos. On the contrary, each story can serve as a variation on a theme, a repetition with minor changes similar to musical polyphony. The imposition of structural order is achieved by means of narrative devices such as music, voice-overs, superimposed product graphics and titles, and so forth. The technological armory of electronic techniques determines the nature and amount of glue that binds the whole together. The business of vignette drama is to display story after story as evidence of the richness and diversity of human life, unified in advertising by the common denominator of a product or service.

A Milky Way commercial is an exemplar of vignette drama that illustrates the structure of the model as well as the weakness to which it is prone. This ad presents 12 separate people stories (groups of characters) interspersed with 12 separate product stories (candy manufacture and consumption). The people stories include a young couple dancing on a pier, another young couple dancing in front of a vintage automobile on a city street, an old couple dancing in front of a jukebox, a black child and a white child sharing a Milky Way, a black father and his daughter sharing a Milky Way, and a group of young black men break-dancing in an urban setting. They are separated by product stories, showing Milky Way in its wrapping, being unwrapped, being manufactured, being eaten, and being discarded.

The people stories are repetitive alternations of product use in no particular order that can be discerned: there is no progression in time (stories of young and old are juxtaposed), in social status hierarchy (race, sex, and class are mixed), or in geographical space (urban, rural, beach, and woods settings are jumbled). In addition, there is no progression in the product stories, for they do not unfold in chronologically linear fashion from the beginning of manufacture to disposal of the wrapper. Instead, each of the 24 stories can be lifted out and rearranged any which way.

Nonetheless, orderliness is aimed at by invoking a narrative device external to the stories that quite literally sounds the main theme—the product claim. The musical soundtrack and lyrics of the song, "You Old Smoothie" are continuous throughout the spot. The song explicitly mentions the product claim in its lyrics—"making life a little sweeter"—and this is shown on screen as a graphic tag line at the end. Thus, the exemplar piles on story repetitions featuring a product-centered claim applicable across many situations, unlike the classical drama, which presents a single action in which product, user, and occasion interact, and change is achieved as a result of a single consumption episode.

The vignette drama model identifies the potential weakness of commercials like this one—the tendency toward "internal clutter," a state in which the number and variety of stories become so excessive that they may blur the brand name/benefit. Recall that in the Milky Way commercial there are 24 separate and distinct stories. Prior research has found that cluttered television commercials—those "with a lot of very short scenes and many changes of situation"—are likely to score below average in changing brand preference (Ogilvy and Raphaelson 1982, p. 18). This suggests that internal clutter may be as much a problem in vignette dramas as is a product interrupt in classical dramas. However, insofar as complexity is inherent in the vignette model in contrast to the spareness inherent in the classical one, a future research task is discovery of the point at which story structures capture the richness of human experience without surfeiting the eye and mind.

To this end, the necessity of determining an optimal level of complexity is proposed, with complexity here defined as "the amount of variety or diversity in a stimulus pattern" (Berlyne 1960, p. 38). The optimal level is the number of stories needed to sustain an audience's interest (too few might be simplistic) without pushing the audience into overload (too many might be confusing) (see Jacoby 1984). Whereas prior research on print ads (Morrison and Dainoff 1972) found that more complex print ads tended to be looked at longer, complexity must be reevaluated in the context of electronic ads to ascertain how it applies to multiple stories on

the screen rather than to multiple elements on the page. Here, Berlyne's comments on complexity suggest that an optimal level relates not only to the number of stories but also to the presence or absence of an organizing device. He points out that there is an inverse correlation between the number of individual elements, which increases complexity, and their spatially contiguous repetition, which decreases complexity. The discussion now turns to an analysis of a sample of ads in order to demonstrate the way that research on complexity and other stimulus issues can make use of the drama typology.

FORMAL ANALYSIS OF DRAMA ADS

The sample of ads (Table 2) comes from a compilation of 40 television commercials previously used in drama research and selected according to the following criteria (Deighton et al. 1989, p. 339): "[It is] a broad cross-section of prime time television advertising by national advertisers. Twenty-five different brands of consumer products and services, including food, beverages, clothing, household supplies, a magazine, transportation services, and financial services, were represented. Fifteen of the brands were represented by two commercials each. Three commercials were 60 seconds long, and the remainder were 30 seconds."

Formal analysis was conducted first to sort the ads into a trichotomous taxonomy of lecture, classical drama, and vignette drama (Table 2) and then to identify the structural model of each drama type (Tables 1 and 3) in terms of previously discussed elements (see above). The following discussion expands upon the points summarized in tabular format.

Plot and Story

The classical dramas are constructed in conformity to the inverted V plot, showing linear chronological progression in which time moves forward throughout the entire commercial like a ribbon unrolling from a spool. Plot unity is a function of three successive stages, with each commercial featuring a beginning, a middle, and an end, and a turning point that causes a change in the main character's life. It is interesting that all of the classical dramas conform to the three traditional unities, adding time and space to that of plot. Unity of time occurs insofar as the three stages occur within a single day. Even when slow-motion camera work freezes time (3 Musketeers, ad B), the inverted V does not go beyond a day-long experience—the teen boy is at first alone in the initial morning stage; he meets the teen girl at a noon turning point; and they float off into the clouds together at sunset. The main character changes from a state of loneliness (he was shooting baskets by himself) to one of affiliation facilitated by the candy bar.

Unity of place occurs insofar as each commercial is limited to one geographical locale or a few related ones.

TABLE 2

FORTY TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

Sponsor	Classical drama	Vignette drama	Lecture
Spic and Span-A	×		
Spic and Span-B	×		
Heinz ketchup-A	×		
Heinz ketchup-B			×
Vision pan			×
Krups mixer			×
Oral-B toothbrush			×
Beef Council-A		×	
Beef Council-B			×
Kraft dressing-A		×	
Kraft dressing-B			×
Nike Air Jordan	×		
Lee jeans-A		×	
Lee jeans-B		×	
Sports Illustrated	×		
Gallo wine		×	
Masson wine		×	
Seagram's cooler-A		×	
Seagram's cooler-B		×	
McDonald's-A	×		
McDonald's-B	×		
American Airlines-A	×		
American Airlines-B	×		
GMAC Finance	×		
Perrier		×	
Diet Pepsi-A	×		
Diet Pepsi-B		×	
Secret deodorant-A			×
Secret deodorant-B	×		
Kellogg's Product 19-A			×
Kellogg's Product 19-B			×
Pepto-Bismol-A	×		
Pepto-Bismol-B	×		
California raisins		×	
RCA television			×
7-UP-A		×	
7-UP-B		×	
Nike Air		×	
3 Musketeers-A	×		
3 Musketeers-B	×		
Total	16	14	10

For example, even though McDonald's ads A and B use more than one locale (in A, various sites in a school and at McDonald's after school; in B, the elderly couple's home, the road to work, the work site, and home again), the places are all integral to a single overarching plot. They not only succeed each other as markers of temporal succession but also cannot be rearranged without loss of meaning.

The most important signifier of plot unity—causality—is inherent in the temporal sequence of these ads. For example, in American Airlines ad A (father and son), the busy executive father's gift of a ticket home so that his son can visit causes the son to feel reassured that his father loves and misses him. Even the one-character drama—the Nike Air Jordan spot in which

TABLE 3

CLASSICAL DRAMAS

Sponsor	No. of characters	Interaction	Main characters	Situation	Type of Narration	Amount, Location of Narration
Spic and Span-A	2	Gesture	Mother, son	Family	Music, no lyrics Voice-over	Continuous Continuous
Spin and Span-B	5	Verbal	Mother, kids	Family	Music, no lyrics Voice-over	Continuous Middle, end
Heinz ketchup-A	3+	Verbal	Boy, two waitresses	Customer/provider	Music, no lyrics Voice-over	Continuous Middle
Nike Air Jordan	1	Gesture	Basketball player	Game	Air sounds Player's voice	Continuous End
Sports Illustrated	2	Gesture	Tennis players	Game/opponents	Game sounds Player's voice Voice-over	Beginning Middle End
McDonald's-A	3+	Verbal	Three boys	School	Music, lyrics Voice-over	Continuous Beginning, mid-plot
McDonald's-B	2+	Verbal	Husband, wife		Music, product lyric	Continuous
American Airlines-A	2	Verbal	Father, son	Family	Music, no lyrics Voice-over	Continuous End
American Airlines-B	3	Verbal	Passengers	Work	Atonal sounds Voice-over	Continuous End
GMAC Finance	3	Verbal	Man, ATM, guard	Customer/provider	Electronic sounds Voice-over	Continuous Near end
Diet Pepsi-A	3	Verbal	Man, two women	Neighbors	Sounds Music, lyrics Voice-over	Beginning After sounds Near end
Secret deodorant-B	2	Verbal	Husband, wife	Marriage	Dialogue, no music Voice-over	 Middle, end
Pepto-Bismol-A	2	Verbal	Husband, wife	Marriage	Dialogue, no music Voice-over	 Middle
Pepto-Bismol-B	4	Verbal	Family, narrator	Family	Narrator Voice-over	Beginning Middle, end
3 Musketeers-A	3	Verbal	Young men	Friendship	Music, product lyric No voice-over	Continuous
3 Musketeers-B	2	Gesture	Teen boy, girl	Dating	Music, product lyric No voice-over	Continuous

Michael Jordan shoots a basket—has causation, made visible as the skill needed to make the basket. The plot moves from an initial stage of ball bouncing through the turning point of its ascent, to a final successful resolution. The change in end-state—successful completion of the free throw—is a standard feature of the inverted V.

In contrast, the vignette dramas are constructed as a series of stories in which unrelated characters replicate similar actions across a variety of spatial settings without necessarily showing change. The chronology has neither beginning, middle, or end, nor any fixed order, for it presents discrete episodes that can be mixed with no loss in meaning because each one stands alone. For example, 7-UP ads A and B (people drinking 7-UP in the rain) present a series of repetitions—different people are enjoying the beverage at different times and in different places. Similarly, the California raisins spot also features individual stories about raisins dancing solo, raisins battling other snack foods, and raisins cavorting next to a humanoid couple, all of which are unfixed in chronological time and potentially able to be rearranged.

Vignette unfixed chronology contrasts with classical linear causation and change, for the former dramas are structured on the basis of association between multiple stories rather than on causal progression within a single one. The model is perhaps most evident in the Nike Air spot, in which 50 or more discrete people and product shots of sports activities are contiguous but ran-

domly ordered. These stories present frozen segments of individual lives that can be broken apart and rearranged. They hammer home the product benefit—Nike's variety of choices of footgear—by replication of situations.

Characters

The vignettes' abundance of stories requires far more characters than do classical dramas. In the latter, a small cast of characters allows focus on one or two main figures whose interaction with the product is the fulcrum of the plot. Even in ads in which more than a few characters are visible, the extras function as background figures necessary to the setting to achieve verisimilitude but are not functional in the plot. For example, in the Heinz ketchup and McDonald's A spots, the peripheral characters are customers and staff in eating establishments, and in McDonald's ad B, they are schoolmates. These figures are secondary to the main characters, whose product usage in familial, social, and business situations is central to the plot. The main characters communicate either verbally (dialogue) or gesturally (touching, body language, eye contact). For example, even though the *Sports Illustrated* commercial shows a game of tennis in which the participants are silent, it reveals verbal communication (talking to oneself) by having the featured player reveal her stream-of-consciousness thoughts aloud.

In contrast, no vignette drama features characters who communicate to each other from story to story, for there is virtually no interaction by means of dialogue, and rarely even a gesture. The product is central, for lack of communication on the part of the human characters indicates that no one person is more important than any other. Even when there is a hint of an interactive relationship—the Paul Masson wine ad shows a dinner party—the characters themselves are so fuzzily displayed that neither individual personality nor interpersonal ties can be discovered. In this commercial, a key to the absence of a main character is that none has a face: in the opening shots the guests are blurred, viewed from the perspective of someone outside a beach house, and in the later shots only their hands are visible. Similarly, while the wedding in the Diet Pepsi ad B appears to be a family one (see Deighton and Hoch 1993), the various character groups (flower girl and ring bearer, bride and groom, stuffy married couple) do not communicate with each other.

Narration

Character interaction or lack of it is replaced by narrative electronic devices (voice-overs, music, lyrics) as connectives, ranging from explicit to implicit. In classical dramas, the narration is less explicit, for fewer devices are used combinatively—none of the commercials has both continuous music and continuous voice-overs, with the exception of Spic and Span ad A. When music or an appropriate sound track (such as crowd sounds in the *Sports Illustrated* ad or atonal sounds in American Airlines ad B) is present, the human voice-overs are either intermittent or entirely absent. That is, the amount of overt narration tends to take up less time than the amount of time used up by the commercial, and it tends to be single channel (vocal or musical) rather than multichannel. It is also intermittent rather than continuous, for it is interspersed with dialogue between the characters. Often the sound track has no lyrics, and in only three cases do lyrics mention the product (McDonald's ad A and 3 Musketeers ads A and B). Otherwise, the sound track is unobtrusive aural scenery (as in the Nike Air Jordan and American Airline spots) or pleasant filler (Spic and Span) rather than explicit articulation of the product name, slogan, or benefit.

In vignette dramas, on the other hand, the narrative devices are more explicit, more combinative, and more frequent. When there are no voice-overs, the music is likely to be continuous, to have lyrics, and to mention the product in the lyrics, adding a musical channel of transmission to the visual and verbal ones. In the one case in which the music is intermittent (Seagram's cooler ad B, the horse show), the voice-over is continuous. Because the stories are held together by externally imposed narration rather than by internal logic, the narrative devices are used synchronistically, for a strong narrative thread is needed to weld the stories together.

To sum up, vignette and classical drama ads show formal differences that call for a new look at the consumer's role in assigning causality in terms of the attribute theory of persuasion (Heider 1958; Kelley 1973). In addition, the formal distinctions shed light on effects of empathy (Boller et al. 1992; Deighton et al. 1989) versus sympathy and its relationship to drama scenarios (Deighton and Hoch 1993; Read 1987). A discussion of these effects in consumer research follows.

EFFECTS OF CLASSICAL AND VIGNETTE DRAMAS

The idea of drama as a stimulus encoding causality and evoking audience responses dates back to Aristotle, who judged the excellence of tragedies to be their ability to bring forth the emotions of pity and terror (Booth 1983). This ability centered on the success of the plot, for the emotional "effect is best produced when the events come on us by surprise; and the effect is heightened when, at the same time, they follow as cause and effect" (Fergusson 1961, p. 70). The Aristotelian tradition's modern articulation appears in British and continental drama and film criticism (Elam 1980; Esslin 1976; Pfister 1991). It is a view that has dominated advertising research as well, where drama is posited as a textual stimulus that encourages consumers to perceive

products as solutions to problems and in this way to assign positive causality to the advertised item. However, the research to date has compared only the classical drama type to lectures (Boller and Olson 1991; Deighton et al. 1989), ignoring the role of vignette dramas in persuasion. The following section addresses the need for including both types of drama in research on persuasion to advance applications of attribution theory to advertising and to distinguish between consumer responses of empathy and sympathy.

Attribution Theory: Single versus Multiple Observations

The drama dichotomy has an important but overlooked place in attribution theory—a cognitive theory of persuasion that posits people as information processors who make causal inferences about behavior and events in the observed world (Folkes 1984, 1988; Heider 1958; Kelley 1973; Mullen and Johnson 1990). The classical single-plot model versus the vignette multistory model parallels attribution theory's two conditions for assigning causality—a single observation versus a multiple observation. That is, classical drama presents a condition in which an individual assigns causality on the basis of a single observation, whereas vignette drama presents a condition in which an individual assigns causality on the basis of multiple observations (Heider 1958).

In the single observation condition, an individual observes a cause at a given point in time and attributes it to an agent on the basis of the configuration principle of ready-made causal formulas. Here it is important to emphasize the distinction between formal or genre cues, which refer to the characteristics of the stimulus object, often called "scenarios" (Read 1987), and perceiver expectations called "schemas" (Bettman 1979) or "scripts" (Abelson 1976; Schank and Abelson 1977), which refer to the individual processing response. Events shown in advertising are often referred to as "scenarios," defined as a "stereotyped sequence of actions carried out to attain a goal in some situation" (Read 1987, p. 290). To avoid semantic confusion, we use "scenario" to refer to stimulus characteristics and "schema" to refer to processing heuristics that govern the way people explain what they see in advertising stimuli. In accordance with schema theory, an individual's preexisting mental structure for processing a drama scenario (Jacoby and Hoyer 1987) should enable the perceiver to develop hypotheses used to interpret the text at hand.

Classical drama presents a scenario that is able to set in motion ready-made causal schemas for interpretation, in that the scenario is familiar to members of Western culture as a result of social knowledge. That is, the fundamental cause and effect pattern encoded in the plot structure of classical drama can be considered a "stereotyped plan" (Read 1987, p. 290) that organizes the action, goal, and outcome of the episode pictured as a linear pattern in the inverted V. This pattern illustrates causality by means of a unified plot, showing solutions to problems as a result of interaction between the character, the situation, and the product—entities that parallel Bettman's (1979) triad of causal agents. The example of the Excedrin commercial (see above) is a typical "pain-pill-pleasure" scenario (Mullen and Johnson 1990, p. 178), in which an ad promotes the notion that any physical or emotional discomfort can be cured by taking the appropriate pill. Here, the classical unified plot presents a clear chain of effects flowing from a singular and explicitly shown cause. In such a case, the observation can be fitted into the observer's data configuration so that s/he can make "economical and fast attribution analysis" (Kelley 1972, p. 2) on the basis of a readily available processing schema.

Attribution analysis relates to the knowledge structure theory of causal reasoning in which people are hypothesized to explain behavior on the basis of interpreting a sequence of actions as "a coherent, plausible scenario. Connecting the actions together requires people to make numerous inferences on the basis of quite defined knowledge about people and the world" (Read 1987, p. 300). Recall that the prime attribute of classical dramas—the unified plot—is a coherent sequence of cause-effect progression. Recall that increased inferencing has been found associated with dramas (Wells 1989), and the motivation for inferencing (or what Read [1987] terms "constructing") may reside in classical drama's presentation of a successful outcome in terms of a tightly woven interaction between a protagonist, a situation, and a product.

Since people are likely to explain sequences of behavior if they can access a ready-made scenario that is part of their social knowledge and that accounts for the actions (Read 1987), the classical format may be best when the advertising goal is to present solutions to problems. The representation of a sequence of related actions as a coherent and unified scenario is so important a difference between classical and vignette drama that its relationship to other configuration principles such as augmentation and discounting requires further study in an advertising context. Whereas prior research on causal reasoning proposes interesting hypotheses about how people make causal inferences in social scenarios (Read 1987), the process has not yet been studied specifically in drama commercials (see Folkes [1988] for review). Additional research is needed to explore the role of classical drama ads in facilitating causal attributions on the basis of single observations.

Also worth study is the parallel role of vignette drama ads in facilitating causal attributions on the basis of multiple observations. Whereas in classical dramas only a single observation is presented, in vignette dramas, causes are observed at two or more points in time.

Hence, attribution proceeds on the basis of covariation rather than of configuration principles (Kelley 1972). Here, causal inferences stem from three main criteria (see Bettman 1979): distinctiveness (an outcome occurs when a cause is present but does not occur when it is absent), consistency over time (the outcome is the same each time the same cause is present), and consensus (many people attribute the same cause/outcome relationship). In addition, temporal contiguity has been hypothesized (Kelley 1972) to strengthen the causal association.

These principles can be applied to vignette drama ads such as the 7-UP A and B commercials (see Table 1) as follows: the product is seen at multiple points in time, over many observations; it is distinctive (present in all of the stories); its presence is consistent over time (the stories are repeated many times); its use leads to consensus (product enjoyment is replicated across individuals); and temporal contiguity associates causes with effects (the product and people stories alternate in regular succession). Product centeredness is what holds all of the stories together in the vignette format, for in the absence of character interaction or situational coherence, it reinforces high distinctiveness, high consistency, and high consensus. Mullen and Johnson consider those qualities essential to attributions of causality on the basis of multiple observations, which they say is successful when it leads "consumers to develop an external attribution—(e.g. 'the product must really be good')" (1990, p. 56) that is product based.

To sum up, the story sequence in vignette dramas relies upon covariation principles (distinctiveness, consistency, and consensus) to influence consumers to attribute causality to a product—the common thread tying the multiple observed instances together. Conversely, the unified plot in classical dramas relies upon the configuration principle of causal schemas to influence consumers to attribute causality to a product/person/situation interaction—the nexus of the single observed instance.

Empathy versus Sympathy

In addition to dichotomous cognitive responses to dramatized events, dichotomous emotional responses—empathy versus sympathy—also relate to the formal structure of classical versus vignette dramas. In this regard, whereas empathy has been identified and studied in consumer research, sympathy has not been much discussed. Further, the multidimensional aspect of each response has received little attention. To define the affective dichotomy and the multidimensionality, we turn to German aesthetic theory (see Langfeld [1920], cited in Vivas and Krieger [1962]), the source of the difference as it pertains to drama stimuli. The affective difference rests on the contrast between an empathic "participant" and a sympathetic "spectator" (Muller-Freienfels, in Delacroix 1927, p. 291): "[In empathy,] I completely forget that I am in the theatre. I forget my personal existence. I only experience the feelings of the characters. . . . I have noticed that by the end of the play . . . I have latched onto a friend. . . . [In sympathy,] I am seated in front of the scene as one seated before a picture. I am continually aware that this is not reality. . . . My judgment remains awake and clear. My emotions are always conscious."

Briefly, in empathy, the participant is primarily active, affective, and lost in the world of the drama, whereas in sympathy, the spectator is detached, judgmental, and mindful of him/herself. Dramas evoke empathy when they inspire viewers to feel *with* someone or something. Empathy is the English term used to express the German *einfuhlung* (Fogle 1962), a visceral feeling-into someone else's life. The empathic response is one in which an individual feels as if s/he were a participant in the "posture, motion, and sensations" of someone or something other than the self—human, inhuman, or inanimate. This emotional response is defined in the psychological literature as one "that stems from the apprehension of another's emotional state or condition and is congruent with the other's emotional state or condition" (Eisenberg et al. 1989, p. 108). In Keats's poetic formulation, empathy occurs when an individual becomes "a part of all that he sees" (in Fogle 1962, p. 153). Note that empathy has at least two dimensions, for it can refer to positive as well as negative situations—Brecht describes the empathic response as one in which "I am weeping with those who weep on the stage, laughing with those who laugh" (Esslin 1974, p. 136).

Sympathy, on the other hand, while also a two-dimensional response, is one in which viewers feel either *for* or *against* someone or something—the negative/positive valence here is sympathy as opposed to antipathy. Sympathy denotes fellow-feeling with (and antipathy, fellow-feeling against) "the mental state and emotions of another human being, or of nonhuman beings to whom we attribute human emotions" (Abrams 1988, p. 49). People can sympathize with the emotional experiences of others without reexperiencing the same emotions in themselves, for it is a less internalized response that stops short of the empathic loss of oneself in another person, object, or situation. It is more self-aware, for "instead of being merged in the object, our feelings run, so to speak, parallel with the object. The difference between the one sympathizing and the object of sympathy is always somewhat present in consciousness" (Langfeld 1920, p. 138). This difference, which in the psychology literature is referred to as "an other-oriented focus" (Eisenberg et al. 1989), sustains dramatic "estrangement effects" (Brecht, in Esslin 1974, p. 136) that engender sympathy toward some characters and antipathy toward others. In other words, when observers feel sympathetic or antipathetic, they feel more

judgmental about someone rather than inside his/her skin. Hence, sympathy/antipathy is considered a more self-conscious, more intellectual, and less visceral response than empathy, which is more instinctive and emotionally absorbing.

To summarize, empathic participation is a fusion with another in pleasure or pain ("I *am* this person"), whereas sympathetic/antipathetic spectatorship is a positive/negative identification with another ("I am *like/unlike* this person"). Empathy thus involves less differentiation between the self and the other, while sympathy allows for more differentiation and more detachment.

Empathic projection onto advertising characters (Boller and Olson 1991) is considered the heart of the process whereby drama ads persuade differently from lectures. This reiterates the traditional view of empathy as a response especially associated with drama, a stimulus long considered capable of entirely absorbing an audience (Langfeld 1920). However, it is most relevant to classical dramas with unified plots, where empathy can be evoked if the observers project themselves into the dramatic protagonist's experiences—living along with the character. Observers lose themselves in the drama by reexperiencing inwardly the emotions depicted. The GMAC Finance commercial's depiction of a frustrated customer might call forth an empathic response in which consumers participate in the hero's annoyance and subsequent relief.

In advertising research, empathic projection (Boller and Olson 1991) has been measured in terms of consumer experiences of participation in the emotions depicted by asking respondents whether they "felt drawn into the commercial, whether the actions depicted seemed authentic, whether the commercial had portrayed feelings the subject could relate to and had made the subject want to join the action" (Deighton et al. 1989, pp. 338–339). This phrasing operationalizes Wells's question—"Did the drama draw the viewer in?" (1989, p. 19)—in terms of consumer responses to ads. Consumers evaluated "good" drama as inducing more empathy than good argument, as well as more empathy than "bad" drama (Deighton et al. 1989).

However, whereas empathy seems to be a response relevant to classical dramas, sympathy seems more germane to vignette dramas. Empathy does not appear to be a relevant criterion in commercials featuring stories so truncated that there is little opportunity for the observer to experience vicarious participation in the life of the protagonist. Indeed, vignette dramas do not present a main protagonist as a focal point for the audience to feel along with (Deighton and Hoch 1993), and the lack of linear order, sustained human interaction, and causal change further diminishes an observer's ability to lose him/herself in what s/he sees.

The response of sympathy/antipathy seems more suited to vignette dramas, in which an abundance of stories provides many characters and situations tied together by a product with which spectators can identify. The explanatory power of the sympathy/antipathy response contributes to understanding respondents' reactions to a typical vignette commercial such as the Diet Pepsi wedding spot (Table 1, see above). Recall that this commercial was evaluated positively as successful in reporting descriptions of feelings, for it was perceived as a "tableau depicting people having a good time at a party where Diet Pepsi is served" (Deighton and Hoch 1993, p. 273). However, it was also evaluated negatively as lacking in empathy—it had no story and kept the audience "at arms length, detached and judgmental, not drawn in to an empathic concern for the characters" (Deighton and Hoch 1993, p. 273). We suggest that empathy is not the appropriate criterion here, for the commercial reports a variety of human feelings more likely to evoke sympathy (with the "cute little kids") or antipathy (against the "bitch lady" "stuffy people," and "stern" old man; Deighton and Hoch 1993, p. 272) rather than empathy. In order to test the empathy/sympathy dualism, research on consumer responses to ads must include both drama types as stimuli to compare between-type as well as within-type effects.

In conclusion, the distinction between classical and vignette dramas can contribute to further research on the formal analysis and consumer processing of television commercials. The view of drama ads as a dichotomous species rather than as a monolithic construct can invigorate research on both stimulus and response. Fowler's words pay tribute to the value of looking within as well as between genres (1982, pp. 42–43): "What produces generic resemblances, reflection soon shows, is tradition: a sequence of influence and imitation and inherited codes connecting works in the genre. As kinship makes a family, so literary relations of this sort form a genre. . . . Naturally the genetic make-up alters with slow time, so that we may find the genre's various historical states to be very different from one another. Both historically, and within a single period, the family grouping allows for wide variation in the type."

[*Received October 1991. Revised July 1993.*]

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